

**THE HISTORY OF THE KANSAS  
STATE SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND 1867—2017**  
(with emphasis on the first 80 years 1867 through 1947)

Compiled and Written on Occasion of the  
150th Anniversary

by  
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June 1, 2017



PLAYING IN THE SNOW NEAR THE SOUTH WING OF THE  
ADMINISTRATION BUILDING (1914-1915)

HV1796  
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2017



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## **FOUNDING AND SUPERVISION OF** **THE KANSAS STATE SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND (KSSB)**

The Wyandot Nation, originally Wendat or Ouendat, means people of the islands, and refers to their origin on the western shores of Lake Huron. The Wyandots were descended from the Iriquois, and were called Hurons by the French because the “Mohawk” style haircuts on Huron warriors reminded them of the bristles on a wild boar’s neck. The Wyandot Nation ceded all lands in Ohio and Michigan for land at the junction of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers. While the band of over 650 Native Americans was still camped along the Missouri River, up to 100 of them succumbed to an illness (perhaps typhoid), and the Huron Cemetery (at 7<sup>th</sup> and Minnesota Streets) was established.

In 1843, the Wyandots purchased 23,000 acres of land from the Delawares, including the site of the city of Wyandotte. A treaty in 1855 allowed the Wyandots to become citizens, providing that the land was divided up so that each new citizen received about 40 acres, after reserving portions for parks, churches and burial grounds. A particularly beautiful hillside, Oakland Park, was part of the land belonging to a Native American, William Johnson, who disposed of his property upon his death to the original town company. When the town was platted in 1856, this tract was reserved as a park. In 1863, the land was offered to the state by the city of Wyandotte as a site for a state institution. The following year, the legislature accepted the 9.6 acres as a location for the “blind asylum” (meaning a place for the care and custody of children/persons who were visually impaired).



THE KANSAS INSTITUTION FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE BLIND  
WYANDOTTE, KANSAS

The first deed recorded in 1866 was found to be only a lease, stating that the transfer of the land to the state was to last only as long as it was used as a blind asylum, and no longer. (However, in 1881, the title to the land was given to the state.) The legislature of 1867 made the appropriation of \$10,000 for the erection of the first building which was finished by October of 1867. The following March, the legislature appropriated another \$10,500 with the stipulation that it not be used until 10 children who were visually impaired (ages 10-21) had applied for admission. Articles were published in local papers requesting the names and addresses of said children. By April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1868, 11 applications had been received.

Governor Samuel Crawford, who had appointed three men as a building committee, now named them the Board of Trustees, and hired W. H. Sawyer as the superintendent. The school most probably opened sometime in May of 1868 (with the admittance of the first five

students), although various historical accounts give dates of either October of 1867 or September of 1868. The Asylum for the Blind became another state charitable institution like the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb (founded in 1861), and continued to be so even after the school's name was changed in 1877 to the Kansas Institution for the Education of the Blind. In 1913, the name was finally changed to the Kansas School for the Blind. During the 1969 school year, it became the Kansas State School for the Visually Handicapped to be more inclusive of those students with low vision, but this was reversed during the 1991-92 school term to the present name, Kansas State School for the Blind.



EARLY PICTURE (PRIOR TO 1877) OF THE KANSAS ASYLUM FOR THE BLIND

The supervision and control of the school changed even more often than the name. Control by its own Board of Trustees lasted until 1876, when the State Board of Charities took over. Throughout the 1890s, there was much political upheaval, which meant the wholesale removal of everyone from the superintendent on down each time the political administration of the state changed. So, everyone left to make room for the appointees of the successful party, who were often inexperienced. In 1901, the board became the State Board of Charities and Corrections (which also supervised reformatories). From 1905 until 1913, a new Board of Control of State Charitable Institutions was created by the governor with one big change; all employees and managers were appointed by the superintendent of each institution, which insured a more stable staff.

Finally, in 1913 the legislature recognized that the Schools for the Blind and for the Deaf were educational institutions, and moved them under the control of the Board of Administration with the state colleges. Four years later, the custodial and correctional institutions also came under this board's control. In 1939, the two schools were reclassified and put with the state's other educational institutions under the Board of Regents. During the 1971-72 school year, the school was put under the control and supervision of the Kansas State Board of Education, where it remains.

When the school opened (according to the First Annual Report), the bylaws provided for students whose vision was so impaired as to prevent them from attending regular schools, and who were not incapacitated by "physical, mental or moral infirmity". These students were aged nine to 21 years old. In 1905, the legislature passed a com-

pulsory attendance law for children who had visual impairments from the age of seven to 21.

During the early days of the school, infectious diseases, congenital conditions, and accidents were the main causes of blindness but improved medical care and advancement in treatments and vaccines helped decrease the incidence. A law was passed in 1929 requiring the application of silver nitrate to the eyes of newborn babies in order to prevent visual impairments due to ophthalmia neonatorum. Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP), previously known as Retrolental Fibroplasia (RLF), was common in the 1950s amongst premature babies who received intensive neonatal care in which oxygen therapy was used to treat immature lung development. The extra concentration of oxygen caused disorganized growth of retinal blood vessels, resulting in retinal scarring and detachment. This increase in babies with RLF caused an increase in the population at the Kansas State School for the Blind (KSSB) in the late 1950s and 1960s. There was also a rubella (German measles) epidemic in the 1960s (1962-65), which caused an increase in population at both the Kansas School for the Blind and the Kansas School for the Deaf in the late 1960s and 1970s.

By the early 1940s, some children were apparently sent to the school in order to receive treatment for their eye condition. The school ophthalmologist and the eye surgeon would offer surgery or medication if they thought improvement or restoration of vision was possible, and the parents consented. If vision was improved enough, the student went back to his neighborhood school. Eventually, the state developed other medical programs which assumed this role, and the school resumed its purely educational functions. Today the school assists parents in transporting students to local ophthalmologists, and

runs a program of low vision clinics in ten regional areas around the state with eleven optometrists and two ophthalmologists who can prescribe low vision aids. The school also contracts for the services of a general practitioner to see sick students once a week.

From early in the school's history, adults were admitted in order to learn a trade, as there were no other training opportunities in Kansas. They attended for six to nine months to learn a skill like broom-making, but they did not live on campus. In 1924, a two-month summer session was started for adults, teaching them literary skills and vocational training. By 1937, the state established the Division of Services for the Blind which offered vocational training, home industries and employment services for adults with visual impairments.

### **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM**

When KSSB was founded, there were four distinct methods of reading and writing for persons with severe visual impairments. The school adopted braille because the first teacher at the school learned it while at the Missouri School for the Blind—the first school in the U. S. to use braille. While KSSB did switch to the New York two-line point system from 1871-1922, it reversed itself when all state schools for the blind endorsed the standard English Braille method.



CLASSROOM—GRADES 1 AND 2 (1904-06)

In the beginning, much of the instruction was done orally because there was no money to purchase braille books. While the teacher dictated each lesson, all students carefully wrote every word. The sheets of paper that each pupil had written were bound, thus becoming a textbook in spelling, reading or grammar.

The early curricula were similar to other regular schools of that time, with added attention to music and industrial training and included spelling, braille reading and writing, mental and higher arithmetic, descriptive and physical geography, mental philosophy, grammar and etymology (origin and development of words). The students were read to from the current news for an hour each day. They spent eight to ten hours in class, including music and industrial training. At first, there

were seven years of schooling, but this was expanded to ten in 1892, and then to twelve years in 1904. The first typewriter was introduced in 1890, and the first talking books in 1934. In 1915, a law was passed that provided readers for persons with visual impairments who were attending a college/university or technical/professional school authorized to give degrees. Kindergarten was established for the first time in 1917.



TYPING CLASS (1914-1916)

Until 1889, the Biennial Reports indicated that the educational program was a good one. From 1889 to 1901, however, the program suffered because of the frequent changes in personnel. It was during this time that the administration of Kansas changed every two years, and each political upheaval brought a complete turnover in staff at

KSSB. A change in supervision and a change in hiring/firing procedures corrected this. By 1922, the course of study was revised and enlarged to meet state standards.

From the earliest years of the school, it was believed that persons who had visual impairments were gifted musically; consequently, music was taught to nearly everyone so students could earn a living through music. Starting with a single piano, the school acquired a myriad of instruments. In 1902, a new pipe organ was installed in the newly built school building. There were opportunities to participate in band, orchestra and chorus, and then showcase their talent and hard work in recitals.



TWIN BOYS WITH THEIR VIOLINS (1904-1906)

The industrial department initiated during the school's first year was limited to the production of brooms. In 1873, a governmental commission inspecting public institutions recommended that there be a greater variety of trades offered, because each graduate should be capable of earning a living. Other trades added were mattress and hammock making, brush making, carpet weaving, piano tuning, and cane chair seating production. The boys started to get paid for their work which incentivized their production. Sloyd (manual training based on woodcarving) was added just after the turn of the century. By the 1930s and 1940s, the shop curriculum included

- piano tuning and repairing,
- broom, brush and mop making,
- mattress making,
- hammock and mat tying,
- chair caning of all kinds,
- rug and mat weaving,
- leather work, and
- upholstery.

The girls, meanwhile, had little industrial training until 1874, when they were taught plain sewing, knitting, bead and fancy work; hat making and braiding were soon added. In 1893, everything changed as the sewing machine was introduced. By 1908, the girls were hand and machine sewing, carpet weaving, knitting, crocheting, darning and patching, and doing ornamental bead work and basket work. In 1912, the school had organized a domestic science course which included ordinary household tasks (cooking, washing and iron-

ing). By the early 1930s, other domestic arts were added including

- mending,
- tatting,
- embroidery,
- loom weaving,
- raffia and reed basketry, and
- home decorating



INDUSTRIAL DEPARTMENT (1915-1916)

While the school's mission in 1868 was to give students a literary and musical education; by 1875, Superintendent George Miller was emphasizing industrial education as a means of learning a trade to earn their livelihood. By 1906, another school leader put more emphasis on becoming a refined, educated, self-respecting citizen. Today, of course, KSSB wants it all. The school wants students to be self-determined and to find work and/or a career for which they have both an interest and an aptitude.

For the first year of school, there was no physical education. Later, however, there was increasing attention to the need for physical training, a healthy diet and exercise. In 1896, a well-equipped gymnasium was built and students were given daily drills using free-hand movements, Indian clubs, dumbbells and wand exercises. By the 1940s, physical education included calisthenics, marching, rhythmic drills, dancing, trapeze and horizontal bar exercise, broad jumping, shot putting, athletic games, track work and roller skating—not a huge departure from what is done currently.



GYM / PE CLASS (1904-1906)



WRESTLING PRACTICE (1914-1915)

In 1930, the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection issued a report stating that schools for the blind should have swimming pools because they afford reasonably safe and active physical exercise. But it was not until 1961, when the Brighton Recreation Center was built, that KSSB got its indoor swimming pool.

In 1940 or 1941, the KSSB track team visited the Missouri School for the Blind in St. Louis for a track meet. The following year, Kansas was supposed to host the rematch, but with transportation facilities limited because of the war and our impending engagement, neither school could travel. So, the two schools did a telegraphic contest—each school had its own contest and telegraphed their scores to the other school. Kansas won!

During most of its history, the Kansas school needed to find another local school with a track on which to practice and hold meets. It was not until 1992 that KSSB got its own track thanks to the leadership and generosity of Nelson Leer, who raised over \$120,000 to match the amount the state was willing to spend. He worked with the Chiefs' Red Coaters, area Chrysler Dealers, and various Lions Clubs. The track site looks over the Big Eleven Pond and has a straight track, an oval track, and an area for field events (shot put, long jump and triple jump). The straight track has high tension cables between all lanes so that students can run their hands along these guide wires to keep them in their lanes; then they just run back and forth in a lane till they have covered the distance of that particular race.

Unlike the strict separation of church and state mandated and practiced in education now, when the school was founded, religious and moral training were stressed. Daily morning and evening worship services were held. Students were expected to attend one of the Sun-

day morning services at a nearby church in addition to the Sunday school service in the school chapel.



GIRLS ON THEIR PLAYGROUND (1908-1910)

In the area of recreation and social life, KSSB aimed to mix instruction and amusement with Christian duty and good manners. The younger children prepared and gave “entertainments” in their sitting rooms to the older students and teachers. In 1919, both a group of Camp Fire Girls and a group of Boy Scouts were formed. Before 1933, all social activities were limited to different groups of students of the same gender. There were separate dormitories and playgrounds which allowed little mingling socially. But in 1933 the superintendent introduced activities that both genders could participate in, like the Excelsior Club, which had card parties, trips to the movies, plays, skating, and hiking.

## **BUILDINGS**

When the present site was chosen for the school, the grounds were covered with large hazel brush and quite thickly wooded. The 1867 legislature made the first appropriation of \$10,000 for the first structure—a small two-story building that opened early in 1868 for the first students. In 1870, an addition was erected. An appropriation of \$25,000 in 1882 built a three-story central addition, and five years later, a two story north wing (symmetrical to the original south wing) was completed. In 1912, bathroom and toilet facilities were added. This original Administrative Building housed offices, classrooms and dormitories, a kitchen, and a dining room. The next Administration Building for the same purposes was built in 1950; it also housed the superintendent's apartment. The second Administration Building was torn down to make room for the new Kitchen/Dining Hall in 1995 and the Edlund Dormitory which was built in 1996. The Edlund Dorm was named in honor of Richard Edlund, a former hardware store owner and member of the Kansas House of Representatives who happened to be visually impaired. He championed causes related to non-discrimination of persons with low vision, and he was a strong advocate of the school's mission.

In 1872 an industrial building (broom shop) was erected, and in 1876 a laundry was built. The broom shop was destroyed by fire in 1889; a replacement was built that same year and enlarged in 1930 to accommodate all the trades being taught. Employees had living quarters there, and in the hospital building erected in 1880. In 1901 law stipulated that the school provide furnished apartments for all officers and their staff. In 1912 the basement of the hospital building was equipped for the domestic science department (home economics).



JOY WAGON IN FRONT OF THE HOSPITAL BUILDING (1914-1915)

The present hospital or health center was built in 1957, and has housed several projects on the lower level—a transition level apartment, Accessible Arts, and presently, offices and a conference room. Now, the dental clinic and the remodeled low vision clinic are housed upstairs. In 2013, this building was named and dedicated as the Maxwell Building after practical nurse Sara Maxwell, the first resident nurse from 1890 to 1918. The Biennial Report of 1917—1918 called her “patient, superbly pleasant, the ministering angel of the sick and afflicted”. She died after contracting smallpox, presumably from her students.

In 1902, the School Building was built to house a gymnasium

(later used just by boys), classrooms and an auditorium with a pipe organ that seated 500. Twenty-six years later, Wilson Hall was built, named after Superintendent Eleanor Wilson. It housed dormitories, a girls' gymnasium and the music department—five music studios, a chorus room and seventeen practice rooms. These two buildings were torn down to make room for the Irwin Building, originally built as a dormitory for younger students in 1971. It is now used as the administration building with KIRC (Kansas Instructional Resource Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired) on the lower level. KIRC supports teachers across Kansas who work with 1100 students who have visual impairments, by providing instructional materials and services, including professional development seminars. These resources, found in a searchable online catalog, include textbooks and library books in braille and large type, assistive technology, and electronic files.

The removal of the Old School Building and Wilson Hall also made room for a new school building, the Johnson Building, which was built in 1977. It was named after a former math teacher and principal Robert L. Johnson. It was erected to house the gym, music practice rooms, and an open concept elementary wing. The open concept was unpopular with the elementary teachers, even before it was built, and temporary walls were eventually added to reduce noise and separate the classrooms.

Vogel Building was also named after a former teacher, Harold Vogel, and was erected in 1962. It housed the library, the science lab, the home economics room (Family and Consumer Science), the music room and other classrooms, with an industrial arts area on the lower level. In 2009, the breezeway between Johnson and Vogel was fully

enclosed so students could easily move between the buildings for classes without exposure to the weather, and allowing the two buildings to operate as one.

When first built, the school was heated by a furnace, but very inadequately. Then the school embraced steam heating in 1886, and a boiler house and smoke stack were erected. These were overhauled ten years later, and in 1932 replaced by a power plant which still stands. Before 1939 the school used coal, which was delivered to buildings on a wagon pulled by horses who were stalled in the Carriage House (built in 1904). After 1939, the coal was replaced by natural gas. Now, as modernization continues, KSSB is moving toward a decentralized system with furnaces dedicated to each individual building which is much more efficient.



1880s KSSB POSTCARD

In the beginning three cisterns provided water for the school, but during dry seasons, water had to be hauled in using barrels. In 1880 the school built a well, a windmill, and a water tank. Eight years later a steam pump replaced the windmill, and in 1908 an elevated tank was erected. In 1922 the school's water plant was connected to the city water system for use during an emergency; after the well caved in in 1934, the school used only city water.

When the school opened, it was lighted by kerosene lamps, which were a fire hazard if accidentally knocked over. In 1892 the buildings were wired for electricity, and the school had its own plant for generating it. By 1921 the school connected to the city's power line, and by 1932 was using only the city's electricity.

In 1904 the school erected a barn and a storage house (now called the Carriage House). The upstairs was remodeled in 1922 to be used as a residence by the maintenance engineer and his family. In 1909, in order to comply with a fire protection law, the school installed fire escapes and fire equipment in its buildings. The next year KSSB installed four drinking fountains and stopped the use of a "common wiping towel".



CARRIAGE HOUSE—GIRLS IN SAND PILE (CIRCA EARLY 1900S)

## **PERSONNEL**

Early on, the superintendents were appointed by the governor; then from 1939 on, they have been selected by the controlling board. Longstanding policy has given the superintendents the power to appoint teachers and other staff. In the beginning, the school had eight personnel: superintendent, matron, three teachers, an attending physician, a cook and a waiter. Between 1868 and 1929, the number of pupils increased from 13 to 135, a tenfold increase, and the number of teachers during approximately the same interlude, increased from three to 22—seven times as many.

According to the American Association of Instructors of the Blind in 1934, teachers of the visually impaired needed to have the same education as any other teacher, with an additional year of specialized instruction in the history and methods of educating students with visual impairments, as well as observation and practice teaching at a school for the blind supervised by experienced teachers. Nevertheless, a decade later, none of the schools for the blind in the U. S. or Canada required such training. The salary scale was so low that it was impossible to require specific training for teachers. However, most of the employees received their room and board free on campus, as well as laundry services. From the beginning, the school has operated on the appropriations made by the legislature for its support. This is largely the case today as well, but now, the instructional salaries at both schools are tied by statute to the salary schedule in the Olathe school district the previous year.

The by-laws written by the Board of Trustees in 1868 stated that the superintendent and his family should reside in the institution, and indeed they did. However, when Superintendent William Daugherty started in 1993, the eminent teardown of the Administration Building put an end to the on-campus residence for superintendents. These by-laws also set forth the superintendent's duties to

- appoint other employees,
- register all pupils,
- prescribe the curriculum, methods of instruction, equipment, textbooks and system of discipline,
- manage the household department (number of employees and rate of pay),

- insure that pupils are comfortably dressed (even supplying clothing if needed),
- take charge of buildings and grounds,
- promote student health and welfare (substantial diet, comfortable dorm accommodations and prompt medical care), and
- imbue student minds with morals and require them to attend church.



SLEDDING (1914-15)

The superintendent was to make an annual report to the board—later it became a biennial report. Originally, the matron was the superintendent's wife. She directed the household department, worked in the office, did shopping for the students and later the department, and planned the meals.

There have been 25 superintendents at the Kansas State School for the Blind. The eighth one was W. H. Toothaker, who served from 1897-1899. He came to Kansas in the 1860s, and became politically active. He attended Baker University and studied law, but felt compelled to abandon his law practice because of his decreasing vision. He next went into farming and raising stock in Johnson County. He was apparently the only superintendent to be visually impaired.

The first woman superintendent was Grace Roseberry who served from 1913-1916. During the administration of Eleanor Wilson (1924-1933), she erected Wilson Hall; her husband was a minister and a blind man who attended KSSB for a period of time and then graduated from the school. Olive Thompson was the third superintendent to serve two terms, 1933-1937 and 1939-1951. She had been active in state and national education domains, and had been the Wyandotte County Superintendent of Schools. During her tenure, she improved the school's education program in order to receive an "A" classification from the state. She also introduced social and recreational life programs between the boys and girls.



MERRY GO ROUND (1914-1915)

For the first time, from 1965-1966, a single superintendent served both the Kansas School for the Deaf and the Kansas State School for the Blind. After that year, Stanley Roth returned to his office as superintendent at KSD only, and Robert “Doc” Ohlsen was hired as superintendent at KSSB. In 2010, the Kansas State Board of Education agreed with a governor’s Kansas Facilities Closure and Realignment Commission to merge the administration and support services of both KSD and KSSB, and appointed the KSSB superintendent, Madeleine Burkindine, as the superintendent over both—the Kansas State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (KSSDB). KSD Superintendent Robert Maile had previously decided to retire.

The Kansas State Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (KSSDB) were established in 1861 and 1867 respectively to educate students in Kansas who were deaf/hard of hearing or blind/visually impaired. The two fully accredited schools are the only two schools in the state under the direct supervision of the State Board of Education. Anchored on two separate campuses about thirty minutes apart in Olathe and Kansas City, Kansas, the schools serve more than 1700 students statewide.

Both schools support highly specialized teacher programs for teachers of students with deafness or visual impairments. Both schools provide professional development programs, various clinics, device distribution, evaluations, and other consultations to districts across the state. Both KSSB and KSD provide preschool services and transition programs for students up to age 21 who need support and expertise in transitioning to work, skill training and higher education as well as techniques and practice in independent living skills in apartment programs on each campus. Both schools work with students who are deaf-blind; the Kansas Deaf-Blind Project is on the KSSB campus, and the Great Plains Regional Office of the Helen Keller National Center (for Deaf-Blind Adults) is on the KSD campus.

KSSB is also a hub of exemplary practices and programs for students with blindness or low vision, including those with additional disabilities who need more intensive support and immersion. Field services team members build local capacity statewide by partnering with local school districts to offer expert assistance customized to individual students or to systemic needs of a district vision program. Field services also serve children birth-three in infant toddler networks. KSSB uses distance technology to provide content-specific expertise to teachers and school teams across the state. Embedded in both the

campus day/residential academic programming and the field services programs are the critical adaptation skills unique to students with visual impairments—Expanded Core Curriculum for the Blind/Visually Impaired (ECC). These are such skills as braille and low vision skills, assistive technology, orientation and mobility (e.g. cane travel), self-advocacy and self-determination, career skills, social skills, independent living skills and recreation/leisure skills. Every child should have the right service, at the right time, in the right place, and these change according to each child's needs, throughout his educational career.

### **SUPERINTENDENTS**

#### *Kansas State School for the Blind 1867 through Present*

- |     |                        |                        |
|-----|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1.  | 1868—1870              | W. H. Sawyer           |
| 2.  | 1870—1871              | W. W. Updegraff        |
| 3.  | 1871—1875              | John D. Parker         |
| 4.  | 1875—1889<br>1895—1897 | George H. Miller       |
| 5.  | 1889—1892              | Colonel Allen Buckner  |
| 6.  | 1892—1893<br>1899—1906 | Lapier Williams        |
| 7.  | 1893—1895              | W. G. Todd             |
| 8.  | 1897—1899              | W. H. Toothaker        |
| 9.  | 1906—1913              | W. B. Hall             |
| 10. | 1913—1916              | Grace Norton Roseberry |

11. 1916—1917 Isa Allene Green
12. 1917—1920 Lee Harrison
13. 1920—1924 T. E Chandler
14. 1924—1933 Eleanor A. Wilson
15. 1933—1937  
1939—1951 Olive I. Thompson
16. 1937—1939 Edna M. Clark
17. 1951—1965 David W. Olson
18. 1965—1966 Stanley D. Roth (KSD Superintendent)
19. 1966—1971 Robert L. Ohlsen
20. 1971—1978 Burton J. Lewis
21. 1978—1982 Hugh A. Pace
22. 1982—1992 Ralph Bartley
23. 1992—1993 Donald Pickering
24. 1993—2007 William Daugherty
25. 2007—2017 Madeleine L. Burkindine (Superintendent of both  
KSSB and KSD 2010—2017)

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